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TAGS: [PGOV](#) [IZ](#)

SUBJECT: SISTANI STAYS SILENT BUT REMAINS INFLUENTIAL ON
REGIONS LAW

REF: BAGHDAD 03512

Classified By: Political Counselor Margaret Scobey for reasons 1.4 (b) a
nd (d)

[¶1.](#) (SBU) As debate over federalism dominates political conversations throughout Iraq, Shia politicians frequently claim that Ayatollah Sistani supports their point of view, even though Sistani has not issued a public statement on the issue. Moqtada al Sadr reportedly has made his support for a law on region formation, in part at least, contingent upon a public endorsement from Grand Ayatollah Sistani. Most agree that Sistani does not want any action that threatens the unity of Iraq.

[¶2.](#) (SBU) Press accounts paint a fairly consistent picture of Sistani's opinion of federalism:

--The Iraqi newspaper Al-Bayyna Al-Jadidah, a pro-Shi'a paper, printed an article on September 17 claiming Najaf governor Adnan Al-Razouki had spoken with al-Sistani and other Shi'a religious leaders in Najaf. According to Al-Razouki, Sistani stated that he would refuse all types of federalism that created the possibility of a divided Iraq, even if federalism eventually proved beneficial to Iraq.

-- The same newspaper also reported that Abdulaziz Al-Hakim, leader of the United Iraqi Coalition (UIC) and a leading proponent of moving forward with a regions law, visited Sistani in an effort to gain his support for federalism. According to the paper, Sistani reiterated that he could not support anything that divides Iraq and that there were several more pressing issues, including national reconciliation and disarming the militias.

[¶3.](#) (C) Shia political leaders have sought to bolster their positions by claiming Sistani's views supported their proposal.

-- For example, SCIRI leader Humam Hammudi claimed in an August 17 meeting with Polcouns that Sistani would accept a single Shia region (the nine province model) or no Shia regions, but that he would reject multiple Shia regions because they would provoke division among the Shia.

-- Khalid Al-Attiya, the CoR Deputy Speaker, reported September 18 that during the meeting of religious leaders in Najaf, he heard Sistani give support to "the principle of federalism" but added that "this was not the right time" (reftel).

--In a September 9 meeting, Shia independent CoR member Qassem Daoud -- who says that he has tried to gain support for a regions formation law that delays implementation by several years and that limits the size of a region to no more than three governorates -- said that Sistani has said nothing

on federalism (COMMENT: Sistani has not stated anything that
would support Daoud's approach. END COMMENT).
SPECKHARD